

VOCA and Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs)

Frequently Asked Questions

April 2024

VOCA grants: the primary federal funding source for CACs and victim service providers

VOCA Grants are the primary source of federal funding for thousands of victim service providers, including Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs). VOCA is a key component within the entire criminal justice system because it funds critical services to victims of crimes so they can not only heal, but also work (many times in partnership) with law enforcement and prosecutors in pursuing justice.

- It is important to note that VOCA grants (released from the Crime Victims Fund (CVF)) are non-taxpayer sources of funding that supports thousands of crime victims services providers serving millions of victims of crime annually and is funded by monetary penalties associated with federal criminal convictions and with deferred prosecution agreements (DPAs) and non-prosecution agreements (NPAs).
- Deposits fluctuate annually based on the cases that the Department of Justice successfully prosecutes and settles.

Unfortunately, the white-collar criminal prosecutions and fines associated with these crimes (which fill the Crime Victims Fund) are at a two-decade low, meaning the CVF has experienced a number of years of concerningly low deposits. At the same time, the need for these services continues to grow. Because of this continued critical need, Congress passed the bipartisan, bicameral *VOCA Fix Act in 2021* to help grow the Fund. This new law now directs *all* penalties/fines collected by DOJ in criminal prosecutions into the Fund. Without the VOCA fix, the deposit in 2021 would have been \$550 million, and the deposit in 2022 would have been only \$291 million. But even with these additional deposits, the CVF has not yet recovered to be able to fully fund critical and needed services. The VOCA Fix was an important step, but because of the current VOCA landscape, VOCA cuts are still happening.

Lower deposits lead to cuts in grants

- Deposits into the CVF were historically low from 2018 through 2022. Deposits the last five years have been \$445 million, \$495 million, \$503 million, \$774 million, and \$822 million respectively - deposits have not been this low since 2003.
- The Crime Victims Fund is out of money. The CVF had a large enough balance to offset the law deposits for several years, but the reserve has now been exhausted. The FY23 appropriations bill obligated the entire existing balance of the CVF at that time, plus approximately the first three months of deposits after the beginning of the fiscal year.
- State grants decreased in FY'19, FY'20, FY'21, and FY'23, reflecting the decreased deposits. And now, with a \$613 million cut to VOCA in the FY24 budget, we anticipate even deeper state grant cuts, with some states looking at 40%, 50% or even 60% or higher in cuts to VOCA victims assistance grants.

What VOCA funds mean to CACs

VOCA has made a significant difference for CACs! Nationally, CACs went from \$21M in FY14 to more than \$300M in FY21. However, with the dwindling available VOCA funds, states are making significant cuts to VOCA grants, which in turn means many CACs are laying off staff or are close to closure, further jeopardizing services to the more than 381,000 abused kids that CACs see each year.

The national impact of VOCA cuts on CACs

CACs use VOCA to fund a number of services, including victim advocates, mental health clinicians, forensic interviewers, and medical exams (among other things). All of these services are in jeopardy with continued and further VOCA cuts. To put it another way:

- CACs estimate that we may/will have to lay off at least 400 MH clinicians (and we believe significantly more) that are directly funded by VOCA dollars. These clinicians provide evidence-based trauma-informed therapies to help kids and families heal. To put it another way:
- CACs serve more than 380K abused kids each year, or more than 1000 abused kids a day.
- Currently, 285K kids are able to access mental health services (in large part due to VOCA funding). Without VOCA, mental health for these 285K abuse kids is in jeopardy.
- VOCA funds more than 1,000 CAC Victim Advocates. The VA not only helps identify mental health needs and link children/families to providers, but also encourages families to continue coming for CAC services. We estimate that access to all 1000 Victim Advocates in our centers is also in jeopardy.
- Even further, the pandemic has already put strains on existing staff, making it harder to not only recruit staff but also to retain them. Additional cuts will further exacerbate the ability and wait times to conduct forensic interviews which not only delays in the child's ability to heal, but also delays assistance to law enforcement in pursuing criminal cases.